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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine the extent to which social workers were called upon to engage in applied communication tasks and to determine various perceptions that social workers held of their responsibilities in the area of applied communication. The 500 respondents selected from a list of Michigan-licensed certified social workers filled out Likert-type scales on (1) how often they were placed in situations requiring them to use each of the 41 identified communication skills; (2) how important each skill was for effective job performance; (3) their general level of ability in each skill; and (4) the extent to which they were interested in improving their ability in each skill. The results indicated the ten communication behaviors used most frequently included serving as a group member in a small, informal meeting, questioning persons to obtain information, and serving as a group member in a formal group meeting. The ten behaviors said to be the most important for effective job performance included nine of those listed as most frequently used, and those 10 items were also listed as the areas of the respondents' greatest ability. Respondents wanted to improve four behavioral skills, which were also among the top ten, including mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups, or agencies; giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment; and speaking as a representative of one's agency. (HTH)

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Social Workers' Applied Communication Skills:

A Research Report

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Social Workers' Applied Communication Skills: A Research Report

Many social workers (and other human service professionals) are called upon to represent themselves or their agencies or groups in a variety of public settings. They rely upon applied communication skills to carry out professional responsibilities, both in small group settings and in large public situations. In a small group context the social worker may serve as a chairperson or group member. In the larger public context the professional may utilize communication skills to present a public speech before a decision making body; to give a technical report; to present testimony before a public body; or even to serve as master of ceremonies at a public gathering.

Such occasions have always been a part of the work of the social worker as an important part of his/her job. Today, however, the need for effective applied communication is greater than before. Competition for scarce resources is a fact of life in the United States today. No longer is it easy to be funded or supported. Professional competence and viability must be communicated to an ever-critical public. Moreover, external pressures result in the creation of and competition within the organization as well. Hence, the need for effective applied communication is present both externally and internally in the field of social work.

In support of this view, Arbella Martinez, former Assistant Secretary for Human Development Services in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, said this (in addressing a Western Michigan University School of Social Work Convocation in 1979):

> We (Social Workers) must become responsive to our changing environment . . . more articulate in enunciating social service policy and the role

> it plays . . . . This will not be an easy task. There are intense competing points of view and differing values in our pluralistic society. Today, there is no consensus on who should be served, what services should be provided, how those services should be provided, nor the appropriate roles of the various levels of government and the private sector.

Purpose of the Study

This paper reports a study to determine the needs and interests related to applied communications skills in the conduct of professional social work activities. The study sought to determine the actual extent to which social workers were called upon to engage in applied communication tasks and to determine various perceptions that social workers held of their responsibilities in the area of applied communication. More specifically, the study attempted to identify: 1) the frequency with which professional social workers engage in particular communication skills; 2) the importance of those skills; for effective job performance; 3) the extent to which these social workers perceive their ability in the performance of those skills; and 4) the degree to which they were interested in improving those skills.

Review of Related Literature

A review of related research has failed to produce research which has been published on the subject of applied communication in social work. Nonetheless, some areas of research which have been published, particularly in area of communication, are summarized here. They relate to business and professional public communication in a general way. As social work is a profession, it is included, but indirectly.

A computer search produced 96 studies for analysis. Categories used in the search were: public communication, social work, business and professional speaking, and organizational communication.

Zelko and Dance (1965) cite 32 references in a chapter which is entitled "Speech Communication in Business and the Professions." Goldhaber (1974) includes 27 sources in a chapter on "Public Communication in Organizations." A bibliography prepared by Professors Dance and Knapp for course instruction includes 87 sources with areas divided into the professions in general, education, engineering, law, medicine, theology, government, the military, and labor organizations.

The importance of speaking in business and the professions is discussed by Holm (1967). He claims that "public speaking is a common and widespread necessity in business, professional, and industrial spheres, and that almost anyone may be called on, sometimes with very little advance notice, to make a speech." Zelko and Dance (1965) quantify the claim. They cite that in the Bell Telephone System in 1964 "more than 5,000 speakers spoke to audiences totaling over 12,000,000 all over the United States." They add that since 1959 over 500 people have represented Smith, Kline and French laboratories by having them speak to over 7,000 organizations.

Dedmon (1970) acknowledge that business is preoccupied with the importance of effective communication. He says, "Industry knows it must communicate with the general public in order to create a favorable climate in which to market its products. . . . Most large industries are so concerned about their public image that they maintain expensive public relations departments employing some of the nation's foremost communications experts."

One of the areas which has received the greatest attention is the literature in speech communication training programs. Knapp (1969) indicates that quantative surveys have been conducted relevant to training programs since 1947. Wasylik, Sussman and Leri (1976) indicate that 95 percent of the manufacturing firms which they surveyed had a training program in at least

one communication skill. Other studies describe various training needs, practices, trends, speaker's bureaus, development of conference training programs, and methodology.

In summary, extensive research has been done which related public/applied communication to business and the professions. We failed to discover any however, which relates applied communication to social work in a specific manner.

Methodology

An exploratory design was developed which utilized survey methods in which a questionnaire instrument was constructed by the authors. Forty-one applied communication skills were identified (in the areas of interviewing, small group communication, and public communication) which might properly relate to a broad range of social workers in direct service and administrative responsibilities.

In the questionnaire responses were sought from social workers on a five-point Likert-type attitudinal scale, seeking: 1) how often they were placed in situations requiring them to use each communication skill, 2) how important they felt each skill was in their position for effective job performance (regardless of how often they might use it), 3) an estimate of their general level of ability in each skill, and, 4) an expression of the extent to which they were interested in improving their ability in each skill. Essentially, the study then obtained data on respondents' positions on each of the 41 items on the four separate scales of the questionnaire. As noted below in the discussion of findings, the researchers also categorized items as being either interviewing, small group, or public communication, or a combination of these categories by utilizing a panel of judges.

Respondents for the survey were obtained by selecting a sample of 500 certified social workers licensed by the Department of Licensing and Regulation in the State of Michigan from a list of 4,700 licensed citizens. It should be noted that the status of "licensed social worker" in the State of Michigan would include those persons with a master's degree from an accredited graduate school of social work as well as others who have met minimal requirements for the State's license law. However, one can conclude that this was the level of certification requiring the greatest amount of professional qualification under the state's law and constitutes a sample which is reflective of persons engaged in professional social work practice in the State of Michigan. A total of 301 usable questionnaires were returned, representing slightly more than a 60 percent return rate, including those returned as unusable. These responses were obtained by using a repeated stage method of mailed questionnaires.

Statistical Manipulation of the Data

It is important to recognize that each of the four scales were treated separately. That is, it was not a valid use of the data to compare the respondents' aggregated scoring on a scale, for example, that asks how often one is placed in a situation requiring use of a particular communication skill as compared to an estimate of one's general level of ability. While each expression regarding a skill might have had the 5-point Likert-type reference point, the qualitative or attitudinal assessment engendered from the respondents were very different for each scale. Consequently, the researchers considered each of the scales as separate measures of attitude and identified the items which were rated most frequently or the highest, on the one hand, or the least frequently or the very lowest, on the other hand. The most fruitful and discriminating use of the data was found in dichotomizing each response

and aggregating the proportion of respondents choosing the highest two points for each item on each scale as opposed to the proportions choosing the lower three points on each scale for each item. This approach provided a more conservative, though appropriate, use of the data (i.e., by recognizing only the data's ordinal nature), while at the same time extracting the full power of the information provided by the respondents. In essence, then, in the discussion which follows, distinctions of difference and similarity are based upon aggregated proportions responding at each end of the Likert scale. Where appropriate, Chi-square is utilized (employing a .05 two-tailed level of significance) in items reported in the following discussion.

The Study Sample

Of the respondents to the survey for which information was provided, 56 percent were female and 43 percent were male; 88.6 percent were white; 8.3 percent were black and the remainder were Hispanic, Native Americans, or Asian; 87.3 percent held a master's degree; 7.3 percent a bachelors degree; and 4.3 percent a doctorate. In terms of education, 50.3 percent obtained their undergraduate major in the area of social science, 13.1 percent in the area of social work, and 36.4 in other areas. Ninety-three percent of the respondents indicated that they had done graduate area work; 81.7 percent had their graduate study in social work; 6.07 percent had their graduate work in the area of social sciences; 6.7 percent in the area of counseling, personnel, or guidance; and 5.3 percent in other areas. The figure of 81.7 percent respondents having their graduate work in social work indicates that a very sizeable number of the sample of licensed social workers in the State of Michigan were also generally oriented to professional social work education. Respondents ranged in age from late 20's to late 70's, with median age being

approximately 40 years of age. The median time since receipt of the highest educational degree was within the last decade. Given the median age of early forties and completion of highest degree within the last ten years, it should be noted that the median number of years employed in their current place of employment was slightly over five years, thereby indicating that these respondents generally had more than their current job placement as experience behind them.

The respondents came from a range of fields of practice and agency affiliations, the most frequently mentioned being agencies serving mental health and mental retardation, counseling agencies, school social work, and health care, in that order. Over half of the respondents were employed in public affiliated agencies, followed by private not-for-profit agencies. The majority of the respondents worked in what might be considered small-to-moderate sized agencies, over half of the respondents being in agencies employing less than 40 persons and two thirds of the respondents being employed in agencies employing fewer than 100 persons.

In terms of work activity, 55.7 percent listed themselves as direct service workers, 24 percent as directors, administrators, or managers; 8.7 percent as supervisors, 2 percent as coordinators, 2.3 percent as teachers or educators, and 6.3 percent listed other job titles or functions.

FINDINGS

Total Sample Population

The 10 highest ranking communication skills in each of the four scales (frequency, importance, ability, interest in training) are listed for the total sample population in Table 1. The ranking represents the percentage of respondents who rated the skill at a 3 or 4 on a continuum of 0-4.

Most Frequent and Important Communication Behaviors

The ten communication behaviors engaged in most frequently (in rank order) were: (1) serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting; (2) questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information; (3) serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting; (4) chairing a small informal group meeting; (5) giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment; (6) mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies; (7) speaking as a representative of one's agency; (7) announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff; (9) conducting a briefing session with staff; and (10) presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.

The ten behaviors said to be the most important for effective performance in their positions included nine of those listed as most frequent. Respondents added the skill of presenting a report in the role of a consultant and did not include the skill of conducting a briefing session with staff. In the main, those behaviors said to be the most frequently engaged in or the most important appear to be those occurring in small group situations.

Overall, the rank order correlation between frequency of communication behaviors and importance attached to those same behaviors was .72 ($p = < .001$) using Kendall's tau, suggesting that the ranking of the frequency of communication behaviors compared to the attitudes of importance of those same behaviors is closely associated for those in the sample.

Ability and Improvement

When asked to rate one's general level of ability in a particular communication skill, the ten items appearing as having the highest levels of ability are the same set of items reported as most frequent and (except for

the one exception noted above) the most important. This would seem to suggest that, at least for the ten items having the highest number of respondents giving the highest scale rating, social workers feel they have the ability to perform adequately in those most frequent communication behaviors they are called upon to perform; and that those behaviors are among the most important. As a means of examining these relationships, Kendall's tau showed a rank order correlation of .69 ($p=<.001$) for relating frequency to ability, and .69 ($p=<.001$) for relating importance of task item to ability, indicating the close correlation between frequency, importance and perceived ability.

When asked to express the extent to which respondents were interested in improving in each of the particular skills, a somewhat different picture emerged. Respondents wanted help in improving four behavioral skills which were also among the top ten in frequency, importance, or perceived ability. These were: mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies; questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information; giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment; and speaking as a representative of one's gaency. In other words, these are communication tasks of the "highest valence," appearing high on all four scales. Two other behaviors or tasks appear high on more than the interest in improvement scale. These are: presenting a report in the role of a consultant (also in the top ten in importance); and presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program (also in the top ten in frequency of performance). Respondents did not rate themselves as highest (i.e., top ten) in ability for either of these two tasks.

On the interest in improvement scale, four "new" tasks appeared (i.e., one's not found in the top ten on the other three scales). These are: conducting a training session with agency staff; giving expert testimony in a

formal hearing or other setting; presenting a program proposal to a decision-making body; and chairing a formal group meeting.

Job Responsibilities and Communication Orientation

The study sample was sub-divided into two major job responsibility sub-groups, administrators/directors/managers and direct service workers. The 10 highest ranking communication skills in each of the scales are listed in Table 2 for administrators/directors/managers and in Table 3 for direct service workers.

The job title provided by the respondents serves as another important intervening variable. As noted above, over half (55.7 percent) of the respondents were direct service workers, while less than half of that number (i.e., 24 percent of the total sample) were directors, administrators or managers. In other words, the sample (and, presumably, the universe) is heavily skewed to the side of social workers perhaps engaging in behaviors, or in need of particular skills, that emphasize a particular set of communication orientations. Examination of the data by job title finds a considerably different distribution of communication emphasis between administrators/directors/managers and direct service workers.

One alternative methodology to comparing ranking of items on a given scale is to determine the significance of difference in how different job titles are distributed in the ratings for a particular item. This approach was utilized in constructing 2 by 2 contingency tables by job title (i.e., administrators/directors/managers and direct service workers) for proportions of respondents rating an item "high" (i.e., 3 or 4) or "low" (i.e., 0, 1 or 2 on the 5-point scale). In this approach the researchers found 32 items

(out of all 41) on the frequency of performance scale on which each job group differed significantly (i.e., $p = < .05$), 12 items of significant difference on the importance scale, 31 items of significant difference on the estimate of ability scale, and 7 items of significant difference on the interest in improvement scale. It is clear that one's job responsibilities influence the emphasis or orientation to any particular communication behavior. The rank order correlation between administrators/directors/managers and direct service workers for all items, controlling for the two job titles, was .29 ($p = < .007$) for frequency, .20 ($p = < .06$) for importance, .16 ($p = < 132$) for ability, and .24 ($p = < .025$) for interest in improvement. It should be noted that these correlations are very low in comparison to total sample correlations and their modest magnitudes reflect an overall averaging of the range of rating for 41 items in each scale.

As might be expected, administrators/directors/managers tended to give more emphasis to larger system communication situations, while direct service workers gave more emphasis to small scale or small group communication situations. Some notable differences appear on the improvement scale. Administrators/directors/managers emphasized the presentation of an evaluation or assessment of a program (direct service workers ranking that item 20th), defending or presenting a budget (40th for direct service workers), and presenting a funding proposal to a decision making body (37th for direct service workers).

In addition, in the improvement scale direct services workers gave first priority to improving skills in giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment (their counterparts rated this item 25th). Administrators/directors/managers reported the skill of announcing and explaining policies and programs to staff, and conducting briefing sessions with staff as

frequently performed, being of high importance and reported a considerably high level of perceived ability. In comparison those same skills were ranked mid-range by direct service workers.

Item Ratings by Sex

The data also were analyzed by controlling for sex. While some differences were noted, the amount and degree of significance did not nearly approach that of job title as a predictor. Furthermore, though significant differences were observed in the aggregate number of respondents giving high ratings to an item on a particular scale, the rankings of those items generally did not differ between males and females.

The notable differences between males and females appeared to be the relative emphasis upon small group or public presentational items. Males reported that chairing a formal group meeting was more important (a 7th ranking for males compared with a 15th ranking for females) and males reported a higher level of perceived ability for that item than females did. Furthermore, males tended to give higher ratings than females on frequency, importance and perceived ability on items which were classified as public presentational skills. Those differences, while consistent, tended to be rather small.

Analysis Based on Skill Classification

The forty-one communication skills were broken down into four major classifications by a panel of 12 expert judges, half of whom were professors of communication and half professors of social work at Western Michigan University. The judges were asked to indicate whether each of the skills would fall into one of four major categories: (1) interviewing skills; (2) small group communication skills; (3) public presentational skills;

(4) skills falling into more than one classification.

It is interesting to note the communication skills that were listed in the top ten of each of the scales (frequency, importance, ability, and improvement) from this perspective. For three of the four scales (frequency, importance, and ability) one public presentational skill appeared among the top ten, one interviewing skill, three small group communication skills, and five skills which fell into more than one classification. For the improvement scale, one interviewing skill appeared in the top ten, one small group communication skill, two public presentational skills, and eight skills were listed which fell into more than one classification. (Twelve skills were included for improvement due to a tie of three skills for the number ten rank.)

These data suggests that social workers use a variety of communication skills. They rate many types as important. They perceive their ability as greatest in small group communication skills and lowest in presentation skills. They desire improvement, in skills which fall into more than one category. Hence, it cannot be said that social workers primarily use only interviewing skills, or small group communication skills, or public presentational skills. Instead, all are used in a variety of contexts.

Conclusions and Implications

Generally speaking, social workers engage in a wide variety of communication behaviors, which range in their frequency of occurance, and are of commensurate importance. Furthermore, social workers generally see themselves as having a sufficient level of ability in preforming applied communication tasks. However, their particular job responsibilities suggests varied communication behaviors, needs, and interest in improvement. Job title for administrators/directors/

managers in comparison to direct service workers is the most powerful predictor in determining significant differences in communication behavior and perceptions. While this may seem obvious, there is no literature to otherwise substantiate these differences, which obviously must be taken into account in educational and training efforts. In addition, while some differences were noted by controlling for sex, the amounts and degree of significance did not nearly approach that of job title as predictor in this study.

The communication skills for incorporation in existing courses or for development of continuing education courses for a general social workers population are of two types. (1) The more "salient" types are those which appear high in reported frequency, importance, and/or ability and about which staff are interested in improving their ability. These skills are as follows:

1. Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.
2. Questioning or examining one or more persons with a purpose of obtaining information.
3. Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
4. Presenting a report in the role of a consultant, and
5. Speaking as a representative of one's own agency.

(2) The second type for curricular development are those tasks for which social workers expressed high interest in improvement, although as combined categories, frequency, importance, and ability are not reported high. These are:

6. Conducting a training session with agency staff.
7. Giving expert testimony in a formal hearing or other setting.
8. Presenting a program proposal to a decision making body.
9. Chairing a formal group meeting.

It might be that these tasks, though not "salient", which social workers see to be of special significance and require particular attention, though they are not called upon to perform them frequently. Another explanation could be that the four tasks in this second type, though not frequently performed, are anticipated to be of such importance and frequency that improvement in ability is necessary. While further research could pursue these hunches, these areas of staff development and curriculum development are nevertheless proper for consideration in developing courses.

It should be noted once again that the skills listed include a variety of communication behaviors in interviewing, small group communication, and presentational speaking. Thus it appears that for prospective social workers the existing course in most departments which is usually labeled "business and professional speech communication" may provide social work students with relevant instruction. Inspection of current texts in business and professional speech communication indicate that those three areas are included. Thus it is assumed that many faculty include units on interviewing, small group communication, and presentational speaking in these courses. The student who desires more extensive work in each of these three areas, of course, would be advised to take separate courses in each as well as other courses. Team teaching by faculty in speech communication and social work would be ideal.

An interesting incidental finding in this study is that instruction should focus on tasks within the social work context which have specific meanings for professionals in the field of social work, rather than relying on general language and general contexts. Responses from this sample of social workers indicated that some items received high ratings when worded in sepcific terms, but when a general reference was used which would

incorporate elements of the same task, the generally-worded item would receive a lower ranking. For example, the communication skill "Speaking as a representative of one's agency" was ranked high on all four rating scales. But the item "Presenting an extemporaneous speech (i.e. prepared but speaking from notes and outline)" received a much lower rating. Likewise the needs and perceptions of administrators/directors/managers vs. direct service workers varied. Utilization of data contained in Tables 2 and 3 would be useful in the development of courses, workshops, and assignments for these professionals with specialized job responsibilities.

In closing, perhaps we should paraphase Arbella Martinez to say that, "We must be responsive to the changing environment." Colleagues in various departments, schools, and professional fields are encountering new communication needs to which we should respond. Indeed, one area which appears to have been neglected in applied and public communication is the field of social work. No doubt there are many others to be identified which fall within the purvue of this professional division.

TABLE 1A: TOTAL SAMPLE POPULATION
(N=301)

FREQUENCY			IMPORTANCE		
Rank	%		Rank	%	
1	87	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.	1	83	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
2	86	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.	2	69	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.
3	67	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.	3	62	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.
4	59	Chairing a small informal group meeting.	3	62	Chairing a small informal group meeting.
5	54	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.	3	62	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
6	53	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.	6	59	Presenting an evaluation or an assessment of a program.
7	49	Speaking as a representative of your agency.	6	59	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.
7	49	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.	6	59	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.
9	44	Conducting a briefing session with staff.	9	58	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
10	39	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.	10	57	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

TABLE 1B: TOTAL SAMPLE POPULATION
(N=301)

PERCEIVED ABILITY			INTEREST IN IMPROVING		
Rank	%		Rank	%	
1	83	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.	1	55	Conducting a training session with agency staff.
2	82	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.	2	54	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
3	72	Chairing a small informal group meeting.	2	54	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.
4	68	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.	4	53	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
5	66	Speaking as a representative of your agency.	5	51	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
6	64	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.	5	51	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.
6	64	Conducting orientation sessions for clients.	7	49	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.
8	62	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.	7	49	Giving expert testimony in a formal hearing or other setting.
8	62	Conducting a briefing session with staff.	7	49	Presenting a program proposal to a decision making body.
10	60	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.	10	48	Chairing a formal group meeting.
			10	48	Presenting an extemporaneous speech (i.e., prepared but speaking from notes & outline).
			10	48	Presenting an impromptu speech (no preparation; on the spur of the moment).

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

TABLE 2A: ADMINISTRATOR'S GROUP
(N = 72)

FREQUENCY			IMPORTANCE		
Rank	%		Rank	%	
1	93	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.	1	84	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.
2	87	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.	2	82	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.
3	85	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.	3	81	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
4	78	Chairing a small informal group meeting.	4	81	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
5	77	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.	5	78	Conducting briefing session with staff.
6	75	Conducting a briefing session with staff.	6	75	Chairing a small informal group meeting.
7	74	Speaking as a representative of your agency.	7	71	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.
8	59	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.	8	71	Chairing a formal group meeting.
9	58	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.	9	70	Presenting a program proposal to a decision making body.
10	58	Chairing a formal group meeting.	10	70	Presenting a progress or activity report to a board or advisory committee.

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

TABLE 2B: ADMINISTRATOR'S GROUP
(N = 72)

PERCEIVED ABILITY

Rank	%	
1	84	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.
2	82	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
3	81	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
4	80	Conducting a briefing session with staff.
5	79	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.
6	79	Chairing a small informal group meeting.
7	75	Conducting orientation sessions for staff.
8	72	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.
9	70	Presenting a progress or activity report to a board or advisory committee.
10	70	Conducting orientation sessions for clients.

INTEREST IN IMPROVING

Rank	%	
1	59	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.
2	57	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
3	56	Defending or presenting a budget.
4	54	Presenting a program proposal to a decision making body.
5	53	Presenting a funding proposal to a decision making body.
6	51	Presenting an impromptu speech (no preparation; on the spur of the moment).
7	50	Conducting a training session with agency staff.
8	50	Presenting a progress or activity report to a board or advisory committee.
9	49	Presenting a paper at a professional conference or convention.
10	48	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

TABLE 3A: DIRECT SERVICE WORKERS
(N=166)

FREQUENCY			IMPORTANCE		
Rank	%		Rank	%	
1	88	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.	1	85	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
2	87	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.	2	72	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.
3	67	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.	3	70	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.
4	63	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.	4	58	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.
5	54	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.	5	57	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
6	47	Chairing a small informal group meeting.	6	56	Chairing a small informal group meeting.
7	42	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.	7	55	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.
8	41	Conducting orientation sessions for clients.	8	52	Conducting orientation sessions for clients.
9	33	Speaking as a representative of your agency.	9	48	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
10	31	Conducting a briefing session with staff.	10	45	Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program.

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

TABLE 3B: DIRECT SERVICE WORKERS
(N=166)

PERCEIVED ABILITY			INTEREST IN IMPROVING		
Rank	%		Rank	%	
1	82	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.	1	59	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.
1	82	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting.	2	57	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.
3	66	Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting.	3	55	Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information.
4	64	Chairing a small informal group meeting.	3	55	Conducting a training session with agency staff.
4	64	Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment.	5	53	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.
6	59	Conducting orientation sessions for clients.	6	52	Speaking as a representative of your agency.
7	56	Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies.	6	52	Presenting a lecture to a public audience on a single topic.
8	53	Speaking as a representative of your agency.	8	50	Presenting an impromptu speech (i.e., prepared but speaking from notes and outlines).
8	53	Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff.	9	49	Giving expert testimony in a formal hearing or other setting.
10	52	Presenting a report in the role of consultant.	9	49	Speaking in public as a representative of a group or committee.
			10	48	Being an expert witness in a court of law.
			10	48	Chairing a small informal group meeting.
			10	48	Chairing a formal group meeting.
			10	48	Presenting an extemporaneous speech (i.e., prepared but speaking from notes & outline).

% = Percentage of respondents who rated item 3 or 4 on a 0-4 continuum.

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Survey of Social Workers'

Public Communication Skills

School of Social Work

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK (616) 383-0974 KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN 49008

May 1980

Dear Colleague:

With increased competition for scarce resources and community support as a fact of life, it is not easy to be funded or supported. An ever-critical public is demanding evidence of increased competence and viability. Public communication has always been an important part of social work and it now plays a greater role in our effectiveness.

Consequently, we need your help as a professional in the field. Would you cooperate by completing the enclosed questionnaire?

This project is a cooperative effort of John P. Flynn, Director of the School of Social Work, and James A. Jaksa, Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences, both of Western Michigan University and is funded, in part, by the Fund for Research and Creative Activity of the Center for Human Services of WMU. The project will identify the public communication skills of certified social workers in Michigan. As a result of your cooperation, we will be better able to determine the training and educational needs of our colleagues in this area of responsibility.

We recognize that the questionnaire is long and appreciate the time that you will spend in completing it. As a professional person you are no doubt aware of the need for an acceptable response rate for our findings to be useful. The questionnaire is designed as a self-mailer and no postage is required. Just staple or tape the questionnaire after completing the items and drop the completed questionnaire in the mail.

In returning the completed form, you are granting the researchers and Western Michigan University your permission to use the data for the purposes described above. All responses will be treated confidentially. The data will be reported in aggregate form only, so that your name will never be used in any analysis or report. The identification number on the mailer will be used only to identify those returns received so that we won't unnecessarily send respondents a second mailing.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this project. You are invited to write to us or call John Flynn at (616) 383-0974 or James Jaksa at (616) 383-4089 in that regard. We will provide all persons in our sample with an abstract of our report.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John P. Flynn, M.S.W., Ph.D.
Director
School of Social Work

James A. Jaksa, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Communication Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate and Graduate Programs Accredited by the Council on Social Work Education

The questions on pp. 2-7 apply to many of the tasks that are performed in serving clients. While a number of items may not apply to your specific job, it is important for you to respond to them by circling the appropriate number in Columns A, B, C, and D.

COMMUNICATION SKILL	A How often are you placed in situations requiring you to use this communication skill?				
	NEVER	HARDLY EVER	AT LEAST YEARLY	AT LEAST MONTHLY	AT LEAST WEEKLY
1. Giving an oral presentation on a diagnostic clinical assessment	0	1	2	3	4
2. Presenting an evaluation or assessment of a program	0	1	2	3	4
3. Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a small informal meeting	0	1	2	3	4
4. Chairing a small informal group meeting	0	1	2	3	4
5. Serving (not chairing) as a group member in a formal group meeting	0	1	2	3	4
6. Chairing a formal group meeting	0	1	2	3	4
7. Serving as a member of a panel	0	1	2	3	4
8. Communicating a charge to a task force or committee	0	1	2	3	4
9. Announcing and explaining policies or programs to staff	0	1	2	3	4
10. Conducting orientation sessions for staff	0	1	2	3	4
11. Conducting orientation sessions for clients	0	1	2	3	4
12. Conducting a briefing session with staff	0	1	2	3	4
13. Being an expert witness in a court of law	0	1	2	3	4
14. Giving expert testimony in a formal hearing or other setting	0	1	2	3	4
15. Giving an oral presentation on a research report to staff	0	1	2	3	4

B					C					D				
Regardless of how often you might use it, how important is this skill for effective performance in your position?					What is your estimate of your general level of ability in this skill?					To what extent are you interested in improving your ability in each skill?				
NOT AT ALL		AVERAGE		CRITICAL	SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW AVERAGE		AVERAGE		SIGNIFICANTLY ABOVE AVERAGE	NOT AT ALL		SOMEWHAT		GREATLY
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4

COMMUNICATION SKILL	A How often are you placed in situations requiring you to use this communication skill?				
	NEVER	HARDLY EVER	AT LEAST YEARLY	AT LEAST MONTHLY	AT LEAST WEEKLY
16. Conducting a training session with agency staff	0	1	2	3	4
17. Questioning or examining one or more persons for the purpose of obtaining information	0	1	2	3	4
18. Mediating or bargaining between two or more persons, groups or agencies	0	1	2	3	4
19. Presenting a report in the role of consultant	0	1	2	3	4
20. Presenting a program proposal to a decision making body	0	1	2	3	4
21. Presenting a funding proposal to a decision making body	0	1	2	3	4
22. Defending or presenting a budget	0	1	2	3	4
23. Presenting a progress or activity report to a board or advisory committee	0	1	2	3	4
24. Giving an oral research report to the general public	0	1	2	3	4
25. Giving viewpoints on local or national issues in public settings	0	1	2	3	4
26. Presenting a lecture to a public audience on a single topic	0	1	2	3	4
27. Advocating, debating or persuading in a public setting	0	1	2	3	4
28. Presenting a speech from a prepared manuscript	0	1	2	3	4
29. Presenting an extemporaneous speech (i.e., prepared but speaking from notes and outline)	0	1	2	3	4
30. Presenting an impromptu speech (no preparation; on the spur of the moment)	0	1	2	3	4
31. Presenting material, using audio-visual aids	0	1	2	3	4
32. Speaking from a microphone or public address system	0	1	2	3	4

B					C					D				
Regardless of how often you might use it, how important is this skill for effective performance in your position?					What is your estimate of your general level of ability in this skill?					To what extent are you interested in improving your ability in each skill?				
NOT AT ALL		AVERAGE		CRITICAL	SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW AVERAGE		AVERAGE		SIGNIFICANTLY ABOVE AVERAGE	NOT AT ALL		SOMEWHAT		GREATLY
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4

COMMUNICATION SKILL	A How often are you placed in situations requiring you to use this communication skill?				
	NEVER	HARDLY EVER	AT LEAST YEARLY	AT LEAST MONTHLY	AT LEAST WEEKLY
33. Speaking as a representative of your agency	0	1	2	3	4
34. Speaking in public as a representative of a group or committee	0	1	2	3	4
35. Giving a public speech to make people aware of and motivate them to utilize a social service	0	1	2	3	4
36. Speaking at a special occasion, such as presenting or receiving an award, giving a speech of welcome, etc.	0	1	2	3	4
37. Serving as master of ceremonies, chairperson, moderator or toastmaster	0	1	2	3	4
38. Introducing a speaker	0	1	2	3	4
39. Presenting a paper at a professional conference or convention	0	1	2	3	4
40. Being interviewed on radio	0	1	2	3	4
41. Being interviewed on television	0	1	2	3	4

Would you like to offer additional comments or suggestions regarding these items, your work, this questionnaire or other matters? Please write your comments here after completing p. 8.

B Regardless of how often you might use it, how important is this skill for effective performance in your position?					C What is your estimate of your general level of ability in this skill?					D To what extent are you interested in improving your ability in each skill?				
NOT AT ALL		AVERAGE		CRITI-CAL	SIGNIFI-CANTLY BELOW AVERAGE		AVERAGE		SIGNIFI-CANTLY ABOVE AVERAGE	NOT AT ALL		SOME-WHAT		GREATLY
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4

(See p. 8 on other side)

This final group of questions asks for some general information about you and your job. Please indicate the most appropriate response number in the blanks provided.

42. _____ Your sex: (1) Male (2) Female

43. _____ Your race: (1) White (3) Hispanic (5) Asian
(2) Black (4) Native American (6) Other_____

44. _____ Year of birth

45. _____ Educational background (please indicate highest degree only):

(1) High School
(2) Certificate
(3) Associates
(4) Bachelors
(5) Masters
(6) Doctorate
(7) Other_____

46. _____ Year in which you received highest degree

47. _____ Number of years employed in present agency

48. _____ Number of years in present position

49. _____ Agency affiliation:

(1) Public agency
(2) Church-affiliated agency
(3) Private not-for-profit agency
(4) Private-for-profit agency
(5) Private independent practice
(6) Other_____

50. _____ Field of practice:

(1) Counseling/Social Services
(2) School Social Work
(3) Health Care
(4) Court/Corrections
(5) Mental Health/Mental Retardation
(6) Higher Education
(7) Public Welfare
(8) Employment Services
(9) Other_____

51. _____ Approximate number of employees in your agency

Please fill in the following blanks in your own words:

52. Undergraduate major received, if any:_____

53. Graduate major or field, if any:_____

54. What is your job title and function:_____

_____

_____

55. In what county is your agency located:_____

56. What kind of job would you like to have 5 years from now?_____

_____

_____